

DEADMAN BENCH

Tape #162

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Interviewed by George Long

Joe Haslem (Joe): Well George, we've heard a lot of talk about this **Deadman Bench**. Of course, I'll tell you my story the way I heard it. I've had a little experience here, I've been here since 1895 and grew up with these old-timers here, and used to hear quite a lot of talk about these things and how they got their name. ? it first up in Grand Lakes there in northwestern Colorado, up in what they call the South Park there. Walden is North Park and Granby and that is in the Middle Park and then the South Park is down in Merkle, you know.

In 1883 there was quite a mining boom had left there, and there was quite a lot of friction there between the people from one side of the mountain and the other about where the county seat was going to be, whether it was going to be over to Granby or Hot Sulfur Springs there. But they each one wanted the county seat at his home town, which is natural, you know.

But on the 4th of July, they was having a big party there at Grand Lake. Some folks were still sitting around the hotel there, and they heard a lot of shooting down behind the saloon there at the ice house. They looked out and one fellow just fell over in the lake and they run down there. They saw one fall over backward into the lake there and they run down there and they said they found Mills laying in the road. Barney Day was laying partway in the water and Dean and a fellow by the name of Webber was leaving and they hurried them up to the hotel. Day and Mills had died instantly and Webber lived 'til about two that afternoon. The next morning Captain Dean, Dean lived several days although he was literally shot to pieces.

There was a deputy sheriff there by the name of Redman. It seems as Redman was wounded pretty much and he couldn't leave. But anyway, he was hid out. I've heard the story that he hid out there for several days until he healed up, 'til he could sort it out. Anyway, he was on his way to the Utah country here.

George Long (GL): Joe, then what about the sheriff?

Joe: Yeah, Redman was the sheriff, no he was the deputy sheriff. The high sheriff was...

GL: ...was Royer.

Joe: Royer, yeah.

GL: What happened to him?

Joe: This Redman was a deputy sheriff. Royer was sheriff there and he finally committed suicide

after it was over there. This Redman had got healed up and he was trying to get out of the country. He laid there for about a week or so, hid out, or maybe three weeks. But I'll tell ya a story, where I got the straight of it from an old friend of mine, Old Ned Willoburt who was one of the first white settlers in Meeker Valley. He homesteaded there right above Meeker at the old agency ditch. The head of the agency ditch that Meeker had at the time of the Meeker Massacre was at the Old Wilbur's ranch, see. He was a brave old fellow, but he told me one time about the first time he was ever down in this country.

He says him and another fellow tried out there at Rawlins to bring some supplies down to the soldiers here at Ouray. They had just moved the soldiers down here at Ouray just a year or so after the Meeker Massacre. So they hired out to bring supplies to them. So they give them, each one, four mules and a wagon a piece and said they was loaded heavy, awful heavy. They give them a little old plow, old walking plow, and an old scraper and they tied one on behind one wagon and one on the other. He said they come on to the Old Rawlins Trail. They used to call that the Rawlins ? and it come to Baggs, then it forked. One swung southwest towards Sunbeam and the other went on east and crossed the Juniper over to Meeker there, and they was on the old Thornburgh trail that comes across there.

He said that they come pretty good 'til they got around to Blue Mountain and then it was just mostly cow trails there and they had a hard time, said they were loaded awful heavy. He said, every wash they'd come to, them little old dry creeks there, they'd have to get down and [get the] plow down and take the scraper, then put all eight mules on a wagon and pull it up and they worked their way 'til they got across. Said they worked around pretty good 'til they got around there to Willow Creek and said that was the biggest wash in the outfit. It was pretty steep and deep and that sand.

They worked there all before noon getting both wagons across. They'd put all eight mules on one wagon and then get up on the bank and go. Anyway they got them across on the west side of the bank and they had corn for the mules, so they put their nose sacks on the mules and left them tied there with their harness on and gathered up some greasewood there and made them a fire and fried a Dutch oven full of biscuits and made a pot of coffee and fried a bunch of salt side meat. Said they just took a stick to lift the Dutch oven off the coals on the fire and there was a fellow says, "Stick them up."

Ned says, "I turned around, there was a fellow there had a great big .45 right in the middle of my back." I said, "You don't have to put that on there to get something to eat." "No," this fellow said, "This looks like hell, holding a man up to get something to eat." Ned says, "You don't have to hold that here to get anything to eat. Listen fellers, get off there and sit down, I don't take any" Ned says, "We sat around there facing him," and he said he ate like a hungry dog. He cleaned up that frying pan full of bacon and had two or three cups of coffee. And he said, "Now fellas, would it be too much bother to cook me some more of that salt-side?" And Ned said, "No, that'd be a pleasure." So he fried him another pan full of that salt-side. He got up in the wagon and said they had an empty flour sack there and about four or five biscuits left there to put in that sack and give to that guy.

He'd had his horse off down in the wash there. He said he backed off, had him covered, and he crawled on his horse and rode away. Ned said, "Now isn't that a hell of a trick, man who wanted something to eat." So Ned was going to pull to the Cottonwoods, that's what they called the K Ranch at that time, the Cottonwoods. He pulled around to the Cottonwoods and said there

was good shade there, a lot of good grass and water there. The mules were tired. They laid over there maybe five or six days letting their mules rest up. On their log, or their directions, they told them there was no water between Cottonwood, which is the K Ranch now, and Ouray. They'd have to make a night drive. So, it was either the fifth or sixth day, they hooked up the latter part of the afternoon and started out for that night drive to go down across Deadman's.

That old road, that old Rawlins Trail, goes practically where the Red Wash Road goes across through down there and out across by the Grand Bench. Ned said that they travelled all night long and it was just coming daylight and he said he got kind of sleepy and he wrapped his lines around his brake lever and was curled over in his spring seat taking a cat nap. The feller in lead hollered, "Get down here quick!" He jumped down and his mules doubled back over and was all tangled up there. He got the lead mules by the bit and kind of straightening them around and stumbled over something. He looked around, it was just getting light a little bit and he said that grave had just been put there that night before. Anyway, Ed says, "You know that's the fellow that healed that guy up." Just a good half a day horseback ride from there to Deadman there through Willow Creek.

Old Andy Strong, who was the first foreman for the K outfit, he had been down to Ouray and was on his way back to the Cottonwoods, or the K Ranch, and come along there that next day after old Ned and them. No, he come along two days before and this fellow was laying there, had just been killed that night before. Ed said that evidently this fellow that came up right on top of him, he found laid out there all night in them cedars 'til it just come day. He was just sitting up in bed. I guess he just woke up and was sitting up in bed and he shot him through the back and then through the head. He had two bullet holes in him. He come in here to the river and he told old Ally Burton and Ally got old Finn Britt and a jug of whiskey and took his buckboard, and they went out and dug a little hole and buried him. Old Ally said that he had a blue muffler around his neck and there was a bullet hole in his back and his head, but his pack horse and saddle horse was turned loose. The fellow who had shot him was still hanging around there.

GL: He'd been camped there, huh?

Joe: They stayed up the night, he just camped the night. This fellow was on his trail, was right on top of him there. There's this little bunch of cedars out there and he was right down in one of them little cedars, maybe fifty yards from where he shot him. The CC's, they finally put a little fence around there and they put Tom Redman, but his name was Bill Redman.

GL: They put what?

Joe: A little fence around his grave there.

GL: And what did they call him?

Joe: Tom Redman. But his name was William Redman.

GL: Very good, Joe.

Joe: I met a fellow, I know a fellow named Redman lives right up on the head of the White River, right over the hill there. I asked him and he said, well, he had some relatives that was kind of half old outlaws anyway, might have been some of his people. But that's the way I get the story.

GL: Well, OK, very good, that's interesting, you know. I've been a-wanting to talk to you about it for a long time and you've mentioned it to me, so...

Joe: That's what the killing was over, where the county seat was to be, whether it would be at Hot Sulphur or Granby.

GL: OK. Thanks a million, Joe, appreciate it.

This interview was held with Joe Haslem at his home in Jensen on Jan. 13, 1986. Joe will be 91 years old his next birthday. He appears to be in fairly good health still, his mind is clear, eyesight is still fairly good and he gets around pretty good. I enjoy the many talks that I have had with Joe, he has a very, very interesting background. He is interested in the things that happened in the early days, and has kept very good track of those events.

Joe and his late wife, Ruth, have really done a big service to the Jensen community, in fact to the Vernal area itself. They've supported many programs and have backed the American Legion Post probably more than anyone else that I know of. They've really taken an active part in that and in many of the things that have taken place in Jensen and Vernal.

John Haslem also was here. John is 85 years old and he, too, is in good health. They feed about forty-two head of cattle that they keep there on the ranch. That's quite a thing for two gentlemen, one 85 and the other nearly 91. I think it's marvelous. They are both very good friends of mine and to them I am very grateful and very proud to have them for my friends.